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Hunting and Fishing Licenses Still a Bargain

"Inasmuch as the Washington Department of Game is almost wholly dependent on revenue from license fees, the rise and fall of the sales barometer is watched closely by the Commission," according to the State Game Commission's second biennial report, issued in 1936. "Fishing and hunting," it continues,

... as hobbies and sports are made more attractive to anglers and nimrods through replenishment of depleted stocks and launching of a practical conservation program. Business trends have swung steadily upward from the depression low of 1931 and a study of license statistics for the biennium years reveals a gradual but unquestionable return to normalcy.

Since we're once again waiting for an economic "return to normalcy," let's look back at the cost of hunting and fishing licenses over the years and try to determine what's "normal."

The second biennial report was published when the Great Depression was still a fact of life. A business upturn was of great concern to the commission, since the Game Department was operating on a shoestring. How that had come about is also told in that 1936 report.

With the formation of the State Game Commission and the department in 1933, something had occurred that seems almost unthinkable today. License fees had actually gone down:

At the behest of sportsmen's organizations, the 1933 legislature reduced state resident hunting and fishing licenses from \$6.50 to \$3 in order to make hunting and angling for the sportsmen less costly during the depression years. The fee for county resident

hunting and fishing licenses remained the same.

Under the pre-state control era, fewer license holders, in proportion to the number of license permits and revenue received today, brought in a larger revenue because of much higher fees. With the general plane of business increasing to a higher level, it is possible that state and county resident hunting and fishing fees will be raised to their former scale.

Despite that hopeful note, the state hunting and fishing license fee was to remain at \$3 until 1948, and it was to be many years more before the cost of a combined license would exceed the pre-1933 price.

In 1933, the "Hunting and Trapping Seasons and Game Bag Limits" pamphlet was a far thinner document than it had been in previous years. This was because seasons were listed by species, instead of by county, as they had been when each county managed its own game seasons.

When it comes to money out of the sportsman's pocket, we're always discussing a sensitive subject, and many find it hard to believe that license fees actually took a bigger chunk of personal income in the "good old days." Most people who get upset at license fee hikes today grew up during the '40s, '50s and '60s when outdoor sports were bargain-basement priced. They forgot, or never knew, that the bargain was born as a response to the depression and that license fees were kept artificially low for years, never really catching up with the needs of wildlife management.

Hunting fees imposed around the turn of the century, if projected to today and based on the proportion of total income

they accounted for, would be considered outrageous.

County hunting licenses were first established in 1904, and they sold for \$1 each. That was when a good meal at a restaurant set you back about 15 cents. State hunting licenses were established in 1906 and cost the hunter the staggering sum of \$5. That was more than a week's wages for plenty of folks.

The first combination hunting and fishing license came along as sort of an afterthought in 1913, but the fishing privilege was thrown in at no extra cost. That was quite a year for wildlife management in Washington, what with the first comprehensive game code being formed under L.H. Darwin, who became the state's chief game warden, as well as fish commissioner in 1913. He drew \$1,800 a year for holding down the two jobs.

"No attempt has heretofore been made to keep any game records in this state," he said in his first biennial report for 1913-14. He pointed out that "... our diversified climate is responsible for the fact that certain kinds of game birds will prosper in one community and are not at all adapted to others ... the several county game commissioners, which have not heretofore had any data to guide them, will hereafter be in a position to profit by the experience of other counties."

By 1921, the hunting and fishing fee had jumped to \$7.50 at the state level, while the county fee had climbed to \$1.50. The \$5 trapping license established earlier was still in effect. By some strange reasoning, women, as well as children under 16 years old, did not need licenses to fish. However, they did require licenses to hunt.

When the Game Department came into being in 1933, it was able to operate more efficiently than the old county-by-

By action of the 1935 Legislature, the state game director was authorized to name "game protectors, the county au-

Money from the sale of the seals went into a separate fund for predator control and was used for payment of bounties. A new bounty law authorizing payment for killing predators took effect in 1935, and for the first time, uniform hunting dates were also adopted statewide. Both actions were considered big steps forward for hunters in those long-gone days. An old bounty law had proven subject to fraud and been abandoned a few years before.

The state organization that replaced the separate county game protectors was far less costly to run than the old system, and it's a good thing it was, for it took in far fewer dollars. By 1945, it was apparent to the state's sportsmen that something had to be done, and they recommended that the legislature allow higher license fees. As a result, state hunting and fishing license fees rose to \$5 in 1948 — just in time to catch the high tide of an inflationary post-war economy.

The price of a deer tag went to \$1 in 1953, and in 1954, separate hunting and fishing licenses were sold for the first time. If you only wanted to hunt, or only wanted to fish, the privilege cost you \$4, but if you wanted to do both, the price tag was now \$7. That was still under the \$7.50 fee in effect 20 years earlier.

An elk tag cost \$5.50, making the total cost of taking an elk \$9.50, including the hunting license fee. This was still \$3 less than what an elk hunter had to pay in 1932.

Deer tags cost \$4 by 1957, and elk tags went to \$7.50, as the department tried to catch up with the rising cost of living in the booming economy of the 1950s. The combined state hunting and fishing license went to \$9 in 1966, fully a third of the century after the department had been formed and the first time that the combined license cost more than it had in the pre-1933 period.

Today, a combined hunting and fishing license costs \$20, and comparing the cost of living with license costs — 50 years ago, 20 years ago and today — it's still a heck of a bargain. □

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WASHINGTON STATE GAME LAWS, 1905-6

Hunter's License

County, Residents, \$1.00, Non-residents, \$5.00, Non-resident Alien, \$50.00
 State, " 5.00, " " 10.00, " " " 50.00

It is Always Unlawful

To buy, sell, offer for sale, barter or trade at any time, game animals or birds except ducks, geese and brant in November.

To hunt without a license.

To sell, salt or otherwise preserve above named game fish for market until August 1, 1908.

To transport game or fish for market—except ducks, geese, brant and snipe, in November, and then not over 25 can be sold in one season.

To use any boat other than one propelled by hand or sneak boat in water-fowl shooting.

To use any gun other than one fired from shoulder.

To fire a gun, or use a flashlight on water-fowl feeding grounds, one hour after sunset to one-half hour before sunrise.

To remove or disturb nests or eggs of any birds.

To in anyway interfere with song birds or have skins or plumage of same.

To have game in cold storage out of season.

To receive game or birds for shipment

except in open season, then affidavit must be made that they are not shipped for sale or profit.

To kill females of any game animal, except deer in open season.

To run deer with dogs, except west of the Cascades in October on the main land only.

To fire, hunt, trap or ensnare, or hunt for hide or horns of any protected animal or birds.

To catch or kill game fish by any other means other than hook and line.

To shoot on Mercer Island in Lake Washington.

To take fish in any manner within 300 feet of any fishway.

To pollute any stream frequented by game fish.

To shoot on enclosed land without permission.

To dump sawdust or mill refuse in any waters of the State.

To kill Geese, Brant and other water fowl on Columbia and Snake rivers in Klickitat, Walla Walla, Franklin, Yakima, Kittitas, Douglas, Columbia, Garfield and Whitman Counties.

Open Season---WHITE

BAG LIMIT

In open season, Antelope or Caribou, 1 male. Mt. Goat or Mt. Sheep, 2 males. Deer, 4 adults. Grouse, Partridge, Prairie Chicken, Sage Hens, Native Pheasants, Ptarmigan, 10 birds per day. Water Fowl, Snipe, etc., 25. In Kittitas County, Chickens, 5. Chinese Pheasants, 5.

Closed Season---BLACK

January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December

ELK AND MOOSE

CLOSED TO 1915

DEER AND CARIBOU

ANTELOPE, Mt. SHEEP and GOAT

QUAIL

Grouse, Partridge, Prairie Chicken, Sage Hens, Native Pheasant, Ptarmigan, east Cascades--Kittitas Co., chickens, Sept. 10 to Oct. 1

GROUSE, Etc., as above, west of Cascades

MONGOLIAN PHEASANT and QUAIL

Closed East of Mountains to 1912

Chinese Pheasant, west of mountains, male birds only

Duck, Swan, Sandhill Crane, Snipe and other water fowl

GEESE and BRANT

TROUT, In lakes and rivers, except Chelan

TROUT, Chelan County only

Bass, Perch, Pickerel, Pike and Pickerel